



MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS IN WORKERS

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- More than 580,000 lost workdays caused by musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are reported each year – more than one third of all the lost workdays resulting from occupational injuries and illnesses.
- Employers with leading safety and health programs in numerous industries report that the number of MSDs can be reduced with appropriate design and management of work environments, equipment, tasks, and tools.
- The challenge is to assist all employers in developing, evaluating, and adopting effective practices to protect employees.

WHAT HAS NIOSH ACCOMPLISHED?

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has provided widely requested guidance on preventing work-related MSDs (www.cdc.gov/niosh/ergopage.html). In addition, NIOSH continues to conduct and fund research addressing many aspects of the relationship between MSDs and both work-related and non-work related factors, including physical and psychological stressors. NIOSH supports approximately 50 projects in these areas.

Example of program in action:

Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants at nursing homes experience the largest number of reported cases of work-related back pain. NIOSH is collaborating with BJC Health System, EZ Way Inc., and ArjoCentury Inc. to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a best practices back injury prevention program for reducing the incidence, severity, and cost of back and other musculoskeletal injuries among nursing home personnel. Use of state-of-the-art lifting equipment has been demonstrated to completely eliminate the exposure to low-back stress associated with manually helping residents to stand and sit. Data for five nursing homes indicate that with use of such equipment, the number of patient handling incidents was reduced by 47%; a 75% reduction was observed in related injury costs through workers' compensation. Results of this evaluation will be published in 2002 and have been presented to several groups interested in approaches to back-injury prevention.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

NIOSH has issued the *National Occupational Research Agenda for Musculoskeletal Disorders* (www.cdc.gov/niosh/2001-117.html). It provides a blueprint for advancing research on MSDs by identifying high-priority research problems. The agenda was developed with the extensive involvement of industry, labor, academic, and government experts. NIOSH will work with partners in the public and private sector to implement this research agenda while continuing to provide information and assistance to workplaces.

For additional information on this and other NIOSH programs, visit www.cdc.gov/niosh.

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